

The Festival of Death

Death is a horrid theme. No one is happy at the thought of it, even thoughtless, irresponsible youth, who lightly talks of it. According to Rousseau, the man who professes not to fear death is a liar! This is true in all cases except those of saints imbued with Right Faith, that is who hold scientifically correct convictions about life. For while the possibility of dying is far from the horizon one may talk as light-heartedly about it as one likes; but once the mind is convinced of the nearness of the end or is even suspicious of it, all flippancy and light-heartedness depart at once from the heart, and a serious and deep-seated anxiety comes to take their place, which is, plainly enough, clear evidence of the emotion of fear. And the fear is natural surely. For a man can face almost any situation if he has life left to face it with; but when life itself is gone everything is ended. He has to part from all his friends and relations, and from things that he loved in life; and the parting is a great wrench. Hearth and home, wife, children, wealth and the collections of rare and precious curios so assiduously gathered together throughout life, and name, fame and all else that used to fill his heart with pride, have to be given up, never to be had again. Nothing will be left, not even life which is slipping from the grasp.

But the case with the saintly man whose heart is fortified with Right Faith is very different. He is ever ready for death and, consequently, has no fear of it.

There are in all seven kinds of fear, as follows:

1. That of this world, i.e., of the society of men;
2. That of the next world, the hereafter;
3. That of loss of the protector or patron;
4. That of loss of money;
5. That of accidents;
6. That of disease; and
7. That of death.

The *śrāvaka* conquers them all at various stages of his progress on the path. A layman can have no fear of "this World", which he conquers with *ahimsā*, unfailing goodness and actual love. He loves his neighbour as himself, and is naturally respected and loved by him in return. The fear of the next world is eradicated with Right Faith, which secures freedom from all undesirable conditions in rebirth in the future, and generally takes the soul to heaven. The faithful cannot go to hells or to the animal Kingdom, or be reborn with a disfigured or distorted body. The fear of the wrath of mythological gods and goddesses is also ended on the acquisition of Right Faith. The third kind of fear is also not possible for him whose faith teaches self-reliance. He is no longer afraid of the loss or frowns of human or divine patrons. But the fear of loss of money is likely to agitate the householder's heart till he rises to the ninth *Pratimā* (step) on his path. He conquers it actually at the moment when he parts with his possessions.

The fear of accidents is generally very feeble in ordinary circumstances but it changes into one of the other varieties of the emotion when actual. So far as the fear of death is concerned, it is overcome the moment one seriously begins to look upon his body as his sole enemy, which the Jain saint is expected to do. But it is the fear of disease which may disturb even saintly equanimity. It is, however, conquered the moment the saint starts making his preparations to qualify himself in the training for *samādhi-marana*. This is a kind of invitation to death itself, though not in the nature of suicide. *Samādhi-marana* is to be distinguished from suicide in respect of several particulars, e.g. mental clarity, peace and tranquillity, the absence of wish to end life on the instant, that is to say the determination to continue to face one's troubles as long as there is a chance of life left, and the heroism, which characterise the former but are wanting in the latter. The man who dies a suicide is a coward; he who resorts to *samādhi-marana* is a hero!

The *śrāvaka*, too, has nothing to fear from death, he rather look upon it as his best friend who will take away what is ugly and unsightly and diseased, and provide a fresh and new body in its place. The only loss in death for a man of right convictions is that of environment! But he is most likely to be drawn into better and pleasanter conditions. In any case. It is the Law, and a thousand times better than being reborn in undesirable conditions and circumstances where those who have not acquired right notions about themselves will go. But he must take ample and good 'provisions' with him to serve him in the hereafter. These consist in the ethical merit with which to open an account in the next life.

Jainism enables ethical merit to be acquired easily or otherwise in this age- virtue is difficult to cultivate, and vice easily accumulated. The child is by nature selfish and brutally savage. When he comes under the influence of society some kind of discipline is forced upon him; but it mostly fails to touch his heart. He now indulges his cravings in secret. Education only makes him a greater hypocrite, though outwardly he wears a lot of tailor-made dignity on his person. Religion, too, might make him a fanatic and thus add to his load of evil, unless its doctrines are scientifically conceived and explained, as in Jainism. It is a piece of the greatest good luck to be endowed with faith in the Jinas teaching, i.e. Jainism. Real ethical merit is acquired easily that way; evil is eradicated and good stored in its place.

Jainism changes one's disposition, replacing vice with virtue, and cruelly with mercy. It always works on the disposition, and makes it noble and good. The Jaina knows the real value of this change, as he knows that the forces residing in his disposition are the organisers and regulators of his future destiny.

What a wonderful change is implied in the knowledge of the soul's immortality alone! Formerly there was nothing that one could cling to; now one clings with exhilarating assurance to one's self. There is no need to run after imaginary gods for long life - immortality one dares not, cannot, ask from them! It is beyond their power. One now enjoys peace of mind, instead of worry and anxiety, one's heart is filled with light instead of the darkness of blankness and despair and he enjoys the assurance of life instead of begging for trumpery boons from imaginary supernal powers! At this stage, one says about oneself: my kit is differently packed now. Never mind if its contents are not all of the very best. I must not mope, perpetually, over my evil deeds of the past. That never serves any purpose. The worst unredeemed villain need only turn to the self to break through the bonds of evil forged by his *karmas*. I am the maker as well as the breaker of *karmas*. I am the resurrection and the life, indeed! At this supreme moment when I am celebrating the festival of death, I must be cheerful in self-knowledge, and tranquil in self-contemplation. The time is glorious, the moment highly auspicious only let me be firm and steadfast in my purpose and gather together as much more of spiritual excellence as I can before parting from my enemy, the body of flesh.

Such is the trend of a pious Jaina's last-minute aspirations and thoughts. But he must surround himself with the friends of the soul only, and say good-bye to those of the body. The self very properly says: If any one come after me and hate not his father, mother, brothers,

sisters, wife and children, and also his own life, that person is not worthy of me (that is to say, of Immortal Life). The body is the enemy of the soul and its friends can also only be obstacles in the path of the soul. One should say adieu to them at once, and proceed to treat the body as an enemy, that is, to deny it comfort and luxury, and to curb down its desiring nature. Any little discipline that one is able to exert in the closing moments of life is of great help. For one thing, it helps to fix the mind on the Soul's Divinity' which is the source of all Greatness and Good.

The friends of the body will recommend animal foods and essences to impart strength to the body to make it live longer in the world but the man of piety will even not touch them. His argument is thus given by a knowing one in immortal verse which translated into English reads:

"If I had hesitated to give my life for thy love.

Then after living for a few days more on Earth I should have had to die one day!

But where is the comparison between them?

One is dying for Love, the other is being seized by death.

Dying for Love, I am now a Divinity Supreme,

The other way, I should still be rotting in the grave!"

Let those who study bodily comforts, therefore, go away as far as possible. The dying man needs only those who will help him in disciplinary self-denial at the last moment. There have been many great saints who have displayed remarkable courage and steadiness in the face of the gravest trouble. Saint Sukoshal was attacked by a lioness, but he remained undisturbed mentally and attained salvation. Saint Sukumal was likewise attacked by a she-jackal and two of her young ones, but he remained firm in his meditations. Many other Saints have had such experiences; but they all remained immersed in Self-Contemplation.

Even advanced householders have displayed remarkable firmness in the observance of the *sallekhanā* vow (*samādhi marana*). The trouble is but for a while; the gain is immense and glorious, being nothing less than life eternal, divine!

We thus only want to be surrounded by the friends and well-wishers of the soul in the closing moments of life, to be able to accumulate as much as possible of firm faith, self-knowledge, renunciation, forgiveness, humility, straightforwardness, contentment and the

other praiseworthy saintly qualities. The friends of the body will only study its comforts and needs, and paralyse the real man within.

When the Pilgrim starts on his journey once more, leaving the body of clay to be disposed of by its friends, his Passport will be examined at the very first outpost of the hereafter, so to speak. Now if it is found not to bear the seal of Right Faith, he will not be allowed by the forces of ignorance to approach the paths of Salvation and Heaven, and only in very exceptional cases of big mundane morality will he be able to go through the Portal of Humanity, but the case will be very different if the Passport has been visa-ed by the *Jinvani* (the Word of the *Tirthankara*) and bears the proper seal. Such a Passport entitles the soul to *Nirvana* (liberation) or Heaven, and, in very exceptional cases of lack of discipline, to a human re-incarnation.

And when the Pilgrim's kit is opened if it contain only selfish brutal thoughts its possessor will be sent to the animal kingdom, and in the worst cases, to Hell. But if it be full of illuminated ideas and saintly excellencies, *Nirvana* or Heaven will be the only place suitable for its owner's future sojourn, a human reincarnation is for the best in the faith-less type, as well as for the worst in the faith-full class.

Herein is evident the full value of right faith and purifying, discipline, so that if the closing moments of life on Earth are to be properly utilised they must be spent in acquiring and strengthening the merit of both. When an individual thus engages himself in the increase of Merit, death ceases to be a lamentable calamity, and is welcomed as a friend. Dying itself then becomes a festival! The friends of the soul are expected to help and strengthen it in every possible way. They must never allow it to forget that it is an immortal being in its own light, and the source of infinite Knowledge and Perception and also of inexhaustible Energy and joy, in a word, a God!

To conclude, death is a horrid theme for all those involved in the darkness of ignorance; but for those who have entered into the domain of life and who understand their spirit nature and the laws appertaining to that nature, it is a joy, a celebration, a great festival, which comes only once in a life-time — the Festival of Death!

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